



CITY OF ABSECON
Municipal Complex
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CITY COUNCIL

MARCH 19, 2020

REGULAR MEETING - 5:00 PM

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Council President, Keith Bennett at 7:00 p.m.

FLAG SALUTE

INVOCATION – Pastor Drew Mangione, Absecon Presbyterian Church

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Butch Burroughs, Caleb Cavileer, Betty Howell, Steve Light, Frank Phillips, Keith Bennett

ABSENT: Sandy Cain

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Horton, Fred Scerni, Jessica Thompson, Carie Crone

STATEMENT OF THE SUNSHINE LAW

NOTIFICATION THAT THIS MEETING IS ELECTRONICALLY RECORDED

PRESENTATION – James Eberwine – Emergency Management Coordinator (also with him was Tony Giardina, deputy coordinator)

Jim gave an update on the COVID-19 epidemic. All the emergency response teams met on Monday and just this morning a conference call with Atlantic County Emergency Management. We are learning ways to avoid contracting the virus and passing that information onto the citizens of Absecon. We hope that if everyone follows the guidelines and set forth to avoid contact, your chances of contracting the virus decrease. However, it is our first responders who not only have to care for their families, but are most at risk. They need to respond to calls and could contract the virus. There is also a shortage of medical supplies. We will have to be patient until the testing is available. He did thank ACCC for giving us masks from their lab department. Today we heard that our emergency responders might get some protective equipment next week. We have been in contact with the schools and Preferred Care and they have shared their plans with us. He spoke about the Spanish Influenza from 1918 to 1920. He recommended to residents not to call 911 unless it's a real emergency. Taking early precautions and making tough decisions may just save many lives. Communications is a major part in all of this. If your systems are good, then you're in good shape. Our IT person, Tony Giardina keeps up to date on things, so we are in good shape.

2020 ORDINANCES FOR ADOPTION

- 03** An Ordinance of the City of Absecon, to exceed the municipal budget appropriation limits and to establish a cap bank (N.J.S.A. 40A-45.14)

Motion for second reading – Councilman Cavileer – second – Councilman Light

ROLL CALL: Butch Burroughs, yes; Caleb Cavileer, yes; Betty Howell, yes; Steve Light, yes; Frank Phillips, yes; Keith Bennett, yes

Jessica – we do this each year to maintain a cap bank in case we would have to have a larger budget in the future. This goes on the expense side of the budget. We are many thousands of dollars under the allowable budget we can have.

Motion to open to the public – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Cavileer

All were in favor.

Motion to close the public – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs

All were in favor.

Motion for final reading and adoption – Councilman Phillips – second – Councilman Burroughs

ROLL CALL: Butch Burroughs, yes; Caleb Cavileer, yes; Betty Howell, yes; Steve Light, yes; Frank Phillips, yes; Keith Bennett, yes

2020 RESOLUTIONS

- 50** Supporting landing the F-35 in NJ and urging the United States Air Force to base F-35 Fighter Jets at the 177th Fighter Wing in Atlantic County, New Jersey.

- 51** Authorizing the City of Absecon to extend sewer payment due dates and licensing late fee dates.

Jessica – this would cover the animal licensing and the boat ramp permits and extend them until May 1st. The sewer payments will not be due April 1st now, but will extended to May 1st.

PUBLIC PORTION (for consent agenda items only)

Motion to open to the public – Councilwoman Howell – second – Councilman Light

All were in favor.

Chris Seher – 707 Chelsea Road – since it wasn't mentioned, he wanted to know if the tax due date would be extended. Some municipalities have done it. You take in about \$1,800,000.00 every quarter and there are other monies available for use and he explained those. People are out of work and can't pay their bills, so this would be the time to slip the tax bill.

Jessica – the tax bills are due May 1st, but we only looked at the immediate due dates at this point. It doesn't mean we wouldn't do it. We only looked at the ones due April 1st. We can consider it.

Motion to close public – Councilman Light – second – Councilwoman Howell

All were in favor.

CONSENT AGENDA

Resolutions 50 and 51 were read again.

Motion to move Consent Agenda – Councilwoman Howell – second – Councilman Phillips

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Light, yes; Phillips, yes; Bennett, yes

APPROVAL OF BILL LIST - \$2,620,682.94

Motion to approve – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Cavileer

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Light, yes; Phillips, yes; Bennett, yes

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Budget Meeting Minutes – 2/27/2020

Regular Meeting Minutes – 3/5/2020

Motion to approve – Councilman Phillips – second – Councilman Burroughs

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Light, yes; on 2/27, abstain on 3/5;

Phillips, yes; Bennett, yes

REPORTS

Keith – announced that due to the circumstances, all future council committee meetings have been suspended.

Parks and Playgrounds – Steve – have not met but he has been in contact with Pete Higbee and he thanked the public for their respect for everyone in this time. He is proud of how people are acting. All sports have been suspended.

Economic Development – Betty – she had her meeting, but the annual general ABCD meeting was cancelled for March 31.

Public Safety – Frank Phillips – we met with normal discussions and we're looking into getting supplies. The fire department asks everyone to check their smoke detectors since they are home now. They do have some extras to give out, as well as CO2 detectors. Keep your distances and stay well. He told residents to go online and look at local establishments. There are some good specials out there.

Keith – stressed to people to only use the 911 system in dire emergencies

Finance – Caleb Cavileer – did not meet, but will get together with Jessica regarding tax payments.

Public Works - Butch Burroughs – nothing to report. Everyone keep safe

Jessica – the building is closed to the public. The employees are still working including our Public Works. You can call, email and use the drop off box out front. The leaf pick up will begin on April 6th and go until May 1st. All trash and recycling is still being collected. The Courts are closed but payments can be made online, over the phone with a credit card or put in the drop box out front. The library is closed as well. Our website will be updated continuously. The training for elected officials has been cancelled. The budget adoption is set for April 2nd and we received our state approval. The electronic tax sale was held yesterday and originally we had 104 properties listed, but 51 paid prior to the sale. These were last year's taxes and sewer that were not paid, not for 2020.

The city wide clean up set for May 2nd has not been changed yet, but will be looked into.

Steve – asked if taxes could be paid in increments if they don't have the full amount.

Jessica – yes, partial payments could be taken.

Caleb – Eddie is not here tonight, but is there anything with what has developed, that would slow down the time frame?

Jessica – she is not aware of anything slowing down. They are moving forward with the work on Meadowview Ave. It's the same with the firehouse.

Keith – according to their meeting minutes, everything is still on time.

MONTHLY REPORTS – for February

Tax Collection - \$3,191,584.00

Municipal Court - \$12,830.96

Municipal Clerk - \$293.00

Construction - \$9,648.00

Mayor – she thanked Jim Eberwine and Tony Giardina our emergency management coordinators, who have been proactively meeting with certain Absecon department heads. Anything we are lacking, they are trying to secure for us. We were made aware today of the bio blast system from our school that they use to kill germs there and she thanked our Superintendent and two custodians for going through our building and spraying. If a resident has a question regarding the virus, they are to call 211, but prepared for a wait. She asked us to support our local restaurants in town. Also for everyone to complete the census information that is going out. We need an accurate account.

PUBLIC PORTION

Motion to open to the public – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs
All were in favor.

Tom Grites, Pres. of Board of Ed – 1106 Spring Lane – he read a statement from what was said at the February 25th school board meeting regarding their budget and clarified what was said. We never considered a 4.2% raise that was going around town. He hopes to continue a collaborative effort with Council, so we don't have miscommunication in the future and wants to move in a positive direction.

Keith – explained the process of their budget getting approved. He then said that residents even think Council has a say over the school budget and are shocked when they find out that we don't. He attended that meeting and he thanked them for the public input being allowed.

Chris Seher – 707 Chelsea Road – he has worked with many of council as colleagues for 10 years and he considers everyone a friend. Everything he says it's not personal, but it's about the city's business and taxpayer's business. He suggested buying gift certificates for local businesses and you can use them in the future. That money you spend now helps them out and we need to support our local businesses. He thanked the school board president for his presentation and he is owed an apology. Everyone used that 4.2 % at the March 5th meeting as the school boards budget increase. They have a lot of expenses with special needs students and the legal expenses for getting out of our sending district for high school. Mentioned Creekfest and the money being used. Jessica said it is not in our budget, but money that was made from the last event and there is about \$25,000 in a trust fund account. We did put in seed money that first event of \$20,000 and now the money in that trust fund will be used for any future events. The funds are under her control and the Community Affairs committee and also city volunteers are heading the festival and making decisions.

Betty – every business in Absecon that deals with food has been contacted and given an April 1st deadline if they want to participate.

Chris – he doesn't think there's been a councilperson who has complimented and spoke the praises of the Administrator/CFO position than him. He saw that there was a 2% raise for the non-union employees, which has been for years and a 5% for the supervisors. He saw that there was a 5 year contract authorized for the City Administrator but no salary. His understanding is that it's a 33% increase from \$30,000 to \$38,000.

Keith – it's \$32,797 and now it's \$38,000 for the administrator position.

Chris – but the CFO position is getting a 5% raise. He doesn't feel the administrator is doing 15% more work and it sets a bad example for other rank and file employees that one would be awarded that much. The previous contract was for 3 years and he was part of that with Mayor Armstrong and he wasn't in favor of it, but he did it and now it's a 5 year contract.

Keith – it is a 5 year contract and you were here for years. We looked at other towns' contracts in this area for both positions and even at this rate, he still thinks we are getting a bargain for the work she does.

Chris – he doesn't feel taxes should be raised with this epidemic situation happening since people are going to have less money coming in. He feels we should use more of our surplus funds this year.

Keith – the 1.7% increase can be attributed to Public Safety. Pension payments went up

Steve – said that with a house assessed at \$200,000, the raise would only be \$34.00. Council is being responsible in that they have not gotten raises since 2012.

Greg Seher – 625 Yarmouth Ave. – he suggested to Council to possibly making the meetings available on you tube and being able to stream it at your own convenience since some residents don't have cable anymore. He doesn't think the tax raise should be taken lightly because it's not a large amount on their tax bill. He feels someone should have contacted the school board and checked the facts before any comment was made in public.

John Rynkiewicz – 1106 Del Mar Court – (School Board member) – when the 4.2% was mentioned at the first meeting where he clearly stated "what Tina just described was the maximum potential the tax levy could be raised by the school board." That amount was never asked for in the budget by the administration. At the second meeting, after that letter went out by Chris, which was not approved by the whole board, we addressed the 4.2% and tried to dispel all the misinformation that was out there. At what point did you not understand that there was no 4.2 % being considered as a tax increase. The facts are in the statement that was read tonight.

Motion to close public – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Phillips
All were in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Cavileer
All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,


Carrie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 5-7-2020